



American Expression E2740 Quote, unquote

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The expression “quote, unquote” is commonly used in spoken English to indicate that someone is repeating the exact words spoken or written by another person. When people say “quote” before a phrase and “unquote” after it, they are verbally marking the beginning and end of a quotation. This spoken form serves the same purpose as quotation marks in writing. The expression helps listeners understand that the speaker is repeating another person’s exact words rather than expressing a personal opinion. Although quotation marks are visible in writing, spoken language requires verbal signals such as “quote, unquote” to communicate the same meaning clearly.

The phrase is especially useful when discussing conversations, speeches, books, news reports, or public statements. For example, a person might say, “She described the situation as, quote, completely unfair, unquote.” In this sentence, the speaker is emphasizing that the words “completely unfair” originally came from someone else. This helps listeners avoid confusion about who actually made the statement. The expression therefore supports accuracy and careful communication in both formal and informal situations.

People also use “quote, unquote” in a sarcastic or ironic way. Sometimes speakers place a word or phrase inside verbal quotation marks to suggest doubt, criticism, or disagreement about the term being used. For instance, someone may refer to a “quote, unquote expert” to imply skepticism about whether the person is truly an expert. In these situations, the expression communicates not only quotation but also attitude and emotion. Tone of voice becomes very important because listeners rely on vocal expression to understand the speaker’s real intention.

The phrase demonstrates the relationship between spoken and written language. In writing, quotation marks are visual symbols used to separate quoted material from the rest of the text. In speech, however, listeners cannot see punctuation marks, so expressions such as “quote” and “unquote” developed as spoken substitutes. This shows how language adapts to different forms of communication. Spoken language often depends on pauses, tone, and verbal signals to express ideas that written language can display visually through punctuation.

Quotations have always been important in journalism, education, literature, and public speaking. Accurate quoting allows people to preserve original meanings and avoid misrepresenting what others have said. Journalists often quote public figures directly in order to report information fairly and accurately. Students and researchers use quotations to support arguments and provide evidence in academic writing. In daily conversation, “quote, unquote” helps speakers clearly identify borrowed words and ideas. The phrase therefore contributes to honesty and precision in communication.

Over time, “quote, unquote” became part of everyday speech in many English-speaking countries. It appears in interviews, television programs, political discussions, and casual conversations. Some people use it formally, while others use it humorously or sarcastically. Despite its simplicity, the phrase remains useful because it immediately signals that certain words deserve special attention. Modern communication, including social media and online discussions, continues to depend heavily on quotations and repeated statements.

In conclusion, the phrase “quote, unquote” is an important spoken expression that helps identify quoted words and clarify communication. It acts as the spoken equivalent of quotation marks in writing and allows listeners to recognize when someone is repeating another person’s exact words. The phrase can also express irony, skepticism, or emphasis depending on tone and context. Even today, “quote, unquote” remains valuable in conversation, journalism, education, and public discussion because it promotes accuracy, understanding, and clearer communication between people.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why is the expression “quote, unquote” important in spoken communication?
2. How does the meaning of a sentence change when someone uses “quote, unquote” sarcastically?
3. What is the difference between using quotation marks in writing and saying “quote, unquote” in speech?
4. Why is accurate quotation important in journalism, education, and public discussion?
5. Can tone of voice change the meaning of “quote, unquote”? Give examples.